

KENDALL GAZETTE

Ask Helen



The Way to A Man's Heart Is Through His Stomach & The Way to Residents' Hearts Is Through Great Dining Experiences

BY HELEN SHAHAM

Q. *My husband and I are both in our 80's. We're considering a move to a senior living community and find that dining is included as part of the monthly fee. Since we'll do most of our dining at the community we are worried that we'll get bored with the food... How can we be sure they know how to create enjoyable experiences day after day?*

A. The dining experience is a common concern for many older adults moving to a senior living community. It may seem a bit hard to imagine eating most of your meals in the same place for an extended period time but rest assured innovative retirement communities don't just make meals; they make the entire dining experience incredible.

Whether its breakfast, lunch or dinner, dining can often be the highlight of the day. It's the time residents gather to socialize and exchange stories with friends and neighbors. And, nothing goes with great conversation like a great dining.

At The Palace, the first step in creating memorable dining experiences for residents is the selection of chefs with extensive culinary backgrounds.

Alon Hershkowitz, the Executive Chef for The Palace Renaissance and Royale Assisted Living Communities, offers a wealth of knowledge and talent, having worked at several of the most luxurious hotels and country clubs including The National Hotel in Miami Beach.

Under his culinary guidance, our Assisted and Catered Living residents enjoy fine dining which rivals some of the best gourmet restaurants. He marries their desire for comfort foods such as traditional meat loaf and brisket with his flair for creating French, Italian, Jewish and Mediterranean specialties. As people age, they experience a natural decline in their senses of taste and smell. Chef Alon compensates by increasing

the intensity of the dish's flavor and aroma with fresh, roasted garlic and special sauces and purees.

"Dining has to be both enjoyable and healthy," said Chef Alon. "We understand the need for limited to almost NO sodium & sugar intake and use only no-salt seasonings and we also offer a wide variety of sugar-free desserts."

Chef Alon, just like Gabriel Garrido, the Food Service Director of our Independent Living Community, The Palace Suites, believe there's always a reason for a celebration and have created theme dinners throughout every month to heighten residents dining experiences.

"Palace residents are well traveled and have very high expectations," said Garrido, who has been with the company for over 10 years. "Employees get their greatest satisfaction from seeing residents happy; therefore, we go above and beyond to exceed these expectations while shattering the stereotypes of dining at a senior living community."

The Renaissance & Royale residents enjoy specialty dinners twice a month. Past themes have included German, Asian and Mediterranean. Suites' residents enjoy gourmet dinners on Thursday nights with menu items including scallops and filet mignon. Also, the Suites' Happy Hour is kicked up a notch regularly. Each features an international theme and dishes from the region are created along with the entertainment. Recent themed Happy Hours have included a Spanish Tapas event featuring over 20 different appetizers along with Flamenco Dancers and an Italian Antipasto Party with over 15 delicious offerings including Proscuitto di Parma and fresh tomatoes & buffalo mozzarella.

Holidays and special occasions are yet another way The Palace communities make the dining experience special. The Palace Suites recently set a record when it hosted the largest Mother's Day brunch buffet for over 140 residents and their families in addition to hosting a myriad of unique brunches throughout the year including a Sunday Gospel Brunch, a Country Western Brunch, an Oktoberfest Brunch, Father's Day, 4th of July, Thanksgiving and Xmas Day & Hanukkah buffets, and more.

Residents also have opportunities to voice their opinions about the dining experience at The Palace. In addition to talking with the Chef as he visits their table every dinner to solicit feedback, they can share their thoughts during the monthly Resident Council meeting or write their comments in the Palace bi-annual Resident Satisfaction Surveys.

Our chefs and dining room mangers take other steps to further maximize resident

dining satisfaction. White linen tablecloths adorn each table and are accented by fresh flowers. Residents also enjoy a glass of wine and freshly baked bread (baked in-house) with dinner, and the young wait staff is educated daily about the Menu, the Daily Specials & their ingredients and how they should be served.

"It's not simply about food on a plate," said Chef Alon. "It's about service. The dining experience begins even before the server arrives at the table; personal service is paramount. Here, the dining staff knows residents by name and remember their preferences."

Chef Alon has launched an engaging, interactive cooking show too. Twice a month, he prepares dishes such as stir fry vegetables, soups and meatballs, taking residents through the food preparation process and cooking stages. Donned in aprons and hats, residents cook along and eagerly look forward to eat the finished products.

To help ease your fears, schedule a reservation for dinner at the community. Most communities will not hesitate to allow you to dine with residents. It'll also be beneficial because you and your wife will be able to meet your potential neighbors in a social environment.

If the chef at the new retirement community thinks as ours do—that the way to residents' hearts is through great dining experiences—you'll soon find yourself inviting your friends and family over to enjoy the wonderful experiences.

If you have questions about the lifestyle changes that go with aging, or if you'd like to be invited to a social event at The Palace Suites, please send a note to Helen Shaham, The Palace Suites, 11377 S.W. 84th St., Miami, Florida 33173, call her at 305-270-7020, or email helen@thepalace.org.

Helen Shaham and her husband Jacob have been operating retirement communities for nearly 30 years. The Palace Suites in Kendall is a luxury Independent Living Community for active seniors. In addition, The Palace at Kendall campus is home to two Assisted Living Residences and a Nursing & Rehab Center. They also operate The Palace Gardens Assisted Living Community in Homestead, Homestead Manor Nursing Home and The Palace @ Home, a Medicare Certified Home Health Agency. Their two newest projects are The Palace at Weston – luxury living for those 55 and over, and The Palace Tel-Aviv, a continuing care retirement community in Israel. They have two communities under development – The Palace at Weston Senior Living and The Palace at Coral Gables. More information can be found on the company website, www.thepalace.org or by calling 305-271-2220.